

# The American Express

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La Quinta, California, USA

PGA WEST Pete Dye Stadium Course

## Tony Finau

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome American Express ambassador Tony Finau to the interview room here at The American Express. Tony, making your sixth start here at the tournament. Just get some opening comments on what it's like to be back in La Quinta.

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's awesome to be back. I enjoy playing golf here. Have some great memories here over the years. I got through qualifying school here to get on to the Korn Ferry. So I think I would say that's right at the top for me as far as the memories around this place.

But I enjoy being here. It's a great time of year. And proud to be an ambassador for Am Ex as well. So this is just an all-around great week for me.

THE MODERATOR: Dating back to last season, have six top 10s out of the last eight starts. So how is your game feeling entering the week?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it feels pretty good. I had a nice practice week last week back home with my coach Boyd Summerhays. We were just in Scottsdale. The weather didn't cooperate over the last couple days, but overall had a nice practice week.

I feel like my game is in a pretty good place. It's early in the year, I don't know if you really can have a full grasp on where your game's at. But that's why tournament golf is important to play. I think I'm just looking forward to competing again and looking forward to starting the season.

THE MODERATOR: As you stated, early in the year, but you've already had a win. You're one who sets goals. What additional goals have you set for this season?

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I'm definitely a goal setter. I think most of us are out here. I think one of my main goals I think stated and I saw on a PGA TOUR clip in Hawaii, honestly one of my main goals is to be as healthy as I've ever been off the golf course. This meaning eating a lot better. I love food. Whenever I'm asked what I would be



outside of being a PGA TOUR golfer I always say a chef and it's because I love to cook and I love to eat. So I want to eat better this year.

If you're talking about goals on the golf course, I think winning is always a goal for everybody. So I like winning as well, so of course winning.

I would still say my main goal is to try and eat a little bit better this year than I did last year.

THE MODERATOR: What's your favorite thing to cook and what are you best at cooking?

TONY FINAU: I love cooking curry chicken. I love eating curry chicken and I love eating curry dishes. I love Indian food. So I would say I'm pretty good at it, because I cook it a lot.

I would say my kids love a good steak. I'm pretty good at grilling. I joy grilling as well. So those are probably my main dishes. A lot of meat (laughing.) We love meat.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll open it up to questions.

**Q. Given everything that's happened in the last six months does it feel different for you coming to a tournament now than it did maybe 7, 8 or 9 months ago?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I think winning breeds confidence. There's no question. I feel that for the most part I've always been a pretty confident person. But winning breeds more confidence, I think.

I think I definitely -- I think I just feel more comfortable with my game. My game's as good as it's been in my career. I think that's always the goal for me every year I play is to just try and get better. I feel like as a player I've gotten better through years. I definitely feel better approaching this year than I did last year.

**Q. Do you feel like your game's better or you're just better at coming into tournaments and putting your game into action?**

TONY FINAU: I feel both. I think my game's better, but I



know how to prepare better and I know how to prepare to win, just having that experience over this last six, seven months, having done it multiple times over the last little bit.

So I definitely know how to -- my game is definitely better, but I know how to prepare to win I think more than I ever have before just because of the experiences that I've had winning over this last six months.

**Q. Given the sort of narrative about you trying to win first time in such a long time and now all the wins just keep coming. Was getting that second one and now this, was that a bigger hurdle than maybe you thought it was or not?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I knew the second win was the biggest hurdle of my career. They say the first one is usually the hardest, but because of how long it took me to get the second one and the validation I think. The event that I won, being at a playoff event, I think that that was a huge kind of turning point in my career. It definitely I think boosted me into these last few victories as well. Yeah, I would definitely say that that was a huge hurdle to get over and a huge point in my career.

**Q. You kept answering those questions from us during that time. Was there a piece of advice you kept coming back to or something somebody told you? Sort of like, I know I'm on the right path, but sort of that guided you through it?**

TONY FINAU: Man, I don't think that I can think on one thing, one piece of advice. I just know that as I was going through it I felt like I was getting better. That was the crazy part was I felt like I was getting better.

I think it was easy to get frustrated because I kept falling short. I would get right to the finish line and lose in playoffs. I lost in a handful of playoffs through those years. Countless other one-shot, two-shot losses.

So it was easy, I think, to -- I can see on the outside looking in how easy it was to see that this guy can't close. I felt like I was getting better and that's all I can ask of myself. I just knew it was going to happen.

It never crossed my mind that I wasn't going to win again. It was just that when it did I had full faith that it was going to happen and then it was going to continue to happen.

So that's kind of where I'm at now, where I'm kind of reaping that, the benefits of just believing in myself and hopefully I just continue the good play.

**Q. How does that manifest itself on the course? In**

**terms of your thought process and your confidence and whatnot. Is it something you can describe or is it just kind of a feeling that, Hey, I got this?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, it's hard to describe how being better or getting better manifests itself on the golf course. I think one of the first places you can look is just flat out stats.

One of the worse stats or one of the stats I that knew I had to get better at in the first couple years of my career was driving the ball straighter. I hit it very far. I was second in driving my rookie year. But I was almost dead last in accuracy.

So that was a point in my game where I could literally look at the stats and say, If I don't get better in this I'm just not going to be a good player out here. I'm not going to last very long out here.

So I knew one thing that I needed to do was to become a great driver of the golf ball and so the stats have shown me that I have, throughout the years, each year I'm more accurate.

But I think stats is one easy way to look at, are you actually getting better. Not just are you feeling better, but do the stats actually show that you're great in that area. I think I've been able to use data to kind of back up what I feel like the parts of my game that are helping.

In the last kind of seven months where I've been on this run I've been a top-10 putter in the world through the biggest stats. So having a team that can kind of help me kind of look at that and say, Yes, you are actually like really great at this over this period of time. Then we know that those things that we're working on in that period of time are actually working.

So I think it's a feeling is the beginning, but having the data to kind of back that up I think is confidence as well.

**Q. You talk about improving your accuracy with the driver. What goes into that? Is it just hitting balls day after day? Are there certain techniques or patterns that you're looking at? How does that work? Is it just hard work or anything else?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, just hard work. Digging in the dirt like they say and finding it. I think my coach, we have, I had a pattern that I wanted to get rid of that I knew wasn't great for driving the golf ball. It was good for iron play, but not for driving the golf ball. You don't really want to hit down on the golf ball when you're driving it. So I knew that that was just pattern I had to clean up.

It's just repetition. You have to have enough repetitions in practice to know that it's going to get better. But it took time. I wasn't a great driver the next year and I wasn't even a great driver the year after that. But through time I've become a great driver of the golf ball.

It just takes a lot of hard work to get to a point where the confidence is high enough in an area that I was very weak at. I had a lot of scar tissue growing up hitting a golf ball because I could hit it far, but I didn't really know where it was going. So having control over that is a lot better feeling these days than in the past.

**Q. You had an explosive year last year. Last year before the season began, right here we talked about you your putting and like you said according to stats it improved. Your strokes gained on greens was trending upwards towards the back-to-back wins and everything. But this time around are you more focused on the mental side or more on the technical side of things to keep the momentum going?**

TONY FINAU: I focus on both. I would say both areas. But I always believe mentally you have to be extremely strong in this game. I think talking about what we were talking about earlier with the wins not coming in the beginning of my career. To me that's, a lot of it is mental, a lot of it is emotional. Just kind of dealing with that, the ups and downs that the game has to offer.

But I try to get better technically. I do the work technically. But you also have to do the work mentally and just keep believing that what you're working on is the right thing and that it will pay dividends. Sometimes now, sometimes in the future, but that eventually you'll end up being the best that you can be just focusing on both facets.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about your days playing the par-3 at Jordan River growing up. Talk about your experiences and also talk a little bit about how important courses like that are as an entry point to the game of golf.**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I loved playing the Jordan River par-3 golf course growing up. I'm really sad that it's not around anymore because I'm not able to just go back there with my brother like we did back in the day, and my dad, and just kind of play a round. I would love for it to be a golf course still.

I think it's super important, especially par-3 golf courses, I think they're up there with the most important courses that we have in areas that golf is played. I think that learning the game from the green back is very valuable. That's how I had to learn because we learned on such a short little

course.

But it was everything for us to grow up on a golf course like that. I think that's a great starting point for anyone that wants to learn how to play golf.

**Q. Going back to the question just before that about the wins not coming early in your career like you wanted. Was there ever a time that you doubted yourself or was your confidence high enough that you knew it would happen?**

TONY FINAU: Yeah, I didn't allow the doubt to creep in. I definitely at times felt deflated and frustrated. I felt like things were just unfair. Like sports, right? And life sometimes can just be unfair.

I've always had that perseverance attitude to overcome. I don't know that I ever doubted that it wouldn't happen, I would say, but I definitely was frustrated at certain points and disappointed, angry.

I think when I lost the playoff against Webb Simpson in 2020 at the Waste Management, that was a tough loss because I had to, after that I had only played one more tournament and then there was a 13-week hiatus because of COVID. So I kind of had to soak in that loss and think about that for like three months. That was the hardest loss of my career.

But I think that was like probably like the greatest thing because it was just perspective to me. It was just like, my kids and my family truly don't know how I feel and that I'm going through this, but they actually don't really care. That was like good for me because it kind of humbled me to just, like, how big was that actually? Is it that big a deal?

So even though I was hurting and super frustrated that that had happened, it was, like, this whole shift of mindset for me where it was just like, my wife and my kids are actually fine. It's not a big deal to them.

So I think it helped bring kind of balance to what I was doing. At the end of the day it ended up helping me. I ended up winning a few like a year later. And then it kind of kicked off to what it's become now.

But doubting never crossed my mind. It never crossed my mind that I wouldn't win again. But I definitely I would say got deflated and frustrated at certain points after some of the losses because it just felt, you know, life's just not fair. But that is life. It's a test. And we all have our trials and things that we go through. But that was part of the test. That's part of the test and now I'm just on to another part of the test.

THE MODERATOR: With that we'll wrap it up. Tony, thanks for taking the time and we wish you the best of luck this week.

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